

Cria Care as part of Management Protocol at Manor House Alpacas (June 09)

Caring for your cria starts with conception

Cria being formed within the first 3 months of pregnancy: skeleton, muscles and organs, etc.

Most growth in last 3 months of pregnancy

Feeding management of the dam!

Dam in good condition at birthing, not too thin, not obese either: Even abortion if underweight, easy birthing, birth weight, milk production, etc

Vaccination of Covexin 10 for best protection of the cria against clostridia (via colostrum)

Previous cria weaned well before. - Colostrum requires time to form, needed for new cria

Female should be shorn a month prior if it is that season; Unshorn – heat stress

Relocation of pregnant females at least 6 weeks prior to birthing - settling in, bonding with new animals

Gestation length - 11.5 months, live births recorded from 315-370 in Australia

Colicky signs in late gestation - uncomfortable, early delivery, uterine torsion

Udder starts forming 4-6 weeks prior to birth.

A few days before birthing the vulva enlarges and softens, the region around vulva and anus relaxes. Females tend to stick to 'their' gestational length'.

Birthing

Make sure your dam is happy; she should be in an environment she knows, with friends around to keep her calm.

Majority is trouble free but still the most important moment in the life of your cria - so be prepared for any trouble: Towels, thermometer, navel disinfectant, surgical clamp, bottle + teats, cria coat, hair dryer, heat lamp, colostrum powder, enema, scale, your vet's phone number

Birthing process

Stage One - Contractions - 1-4 hours

Females often start talking the evening before; Frequent visits to the dung pile, restless, rolling, off food, tail up, but often no outward signs at all.

Stage Two - Entering birth canal & delivery – 30-60 min

Normal presentation: Head on the front legs, legs usually rupture the membranes (if not use your finger to tear it). Once head, neck and front feet are fully extended, fluid drains from the mouth.

From here to complete expulsion it may take another 10 min, but be patient.

Stage Three – Expulsion of afterbirth – 4-6 h

Nursing stimulates the release of oxytocin, which helps in expulsion of the placenta.

Never pull on it. If the bag of fluids pulling it downward ruptured, a small plastic canister containing 300-500 ml water tied to the section hanging out might help at a later stage as well as one or two oxytocin injections.

Intervene – but don't panic – or call the Vet, if

- Individual stages take longer than normal
- The cria is presented abnormally
- No progress has been made for 10-15 minutes after partial delivery of the foetus (especially head and front feet)

Most birthing problems seem to involve malpresentation:

- 2 front feet plus head – Try pulling gently but firmly downwards, rearwards. Slightly tilting the cria to 10 or 2 o'clock might aid the delivery, taking advantage of the greater diagonal diameter of the mother's pelvis.

- Only 1 leg, or 2 front legs, no head – Do not pull! You can do permanent internal damage to the dam!

"Llama and Alpaca Neonatal Care" by B. B. Smith, K. I. Timm, P. O. Long: ISBN 0-9646618-3-7:

'15-Minute Rule – If you can't solve the problem in 15 minutes – GET HELP!!!'

First check up of newborn – Navel, mouth and nose, teeth, breathing normal (mouth closed), normal colour, showing muscle tone, is it active, sex, anus open, anything extraordinary?

Dip the navel / 7% iodine

Mother ok - not bleeding excessively?

Umbilical bleedings – excessive bleeding needs to be stopped immediately by clamping / tying off
Labourled respiration - make sure airways are not congested, hold up by hindquarters, tapping rib cage or gently swinging in a circle to expel fluids. Note colour. Oxygen might be indicated.
If not active - stimulate by briskly rubbing it

Normal process of the neonate

Kush in 10min
Standing 2h
Suckling 4h

Birth weights

On farm average now 7kg.
At risk below 5.5kg - need special attention / observation
Beware of too big crias, they will get stuck more easily, needing assistance or even caesarean sections.

Not attempting to stand within 1h / no suckling reflex

Take temperature (needs to be min. 37 degrees) - warm up if below: heat lamp, hot water bottles, out of the wind.

Supplementary colostrum

Colostrum – the cria's only source of antibodies during the first weeks of life.
Transfer of passive immunity – a special bowl function to enable this, but only within the first 12 hours of life.

We supplement colostrum to ensure sufficient intake with:

- Late afternoon birthings
- Inexperienced maidens with probably low quality colostrum
- Nervous females
- Crias unable to stand
- Premature crias

Do not feed any cria unless temperature is normal!

Usually a once off dose of 125 ml (slightly warmer than body temp) is given shortly after birth and gets the cria going sufficiently. If needed up to 6-8% BW daily (divided into 8 meals, about 2 h apart; Don't feed at night - the gut needs rest).

Supplementary feeding

Insufficient milk from mother – poor weight gain, cria constantly looking for more
Feed milk 10-15% BW divided into 8 meals, about 2 h apart in the beginning. Added glucose works a treat, probiotics also help. Don't feed at night - the gut needs rest once the appropriate amount is reached.

Additional feeding: Large hole in the teat - you don't want sucking satisfaction as the cria should go back and continue at mother

Totally bottle-fed: small hole - needs sucking satisfaction / Keep with other alpacas, do not pet.
Last resort: stomach tubing.

Observation

Cria should be alert and active, following its mother later in the day, but still sleeping a lot in the first few days. A cria looking for milk continuously is obviously hungry and most probably not getting enough.

- **ADE, VitE+Sel** at birth gives the cria all it needs for a good start.

We maintain above plus Be-Complex on a monthly basis till weaning.

- **Meconium** – usually should have been passed by day 2. We routinely give an enema the morning after birth to make sure it is passed.
- Regular **weighing** - Crias often loose weight after birth, but should be at birth weight again on day 3. Weight should double in first month.
- Vaccinations – Covexin10, x2, 6 weeks apart. We give it every six months thereafter.
- **Feed mother enough minerals and vitamins as well as calcium, phosphorous, protein and energy, so that she has got enough to pass on to her cria and still maintain herself!**

Problems of the newborn

- Dummies – these crias have suffered brain damage due to lack of oxygen during birth:
 - From disoriented, unsteady on their feet, to blind, unable to stand, and periodic convulsions. Don't give up on these just yet time might heal the damage.
- Cardiac problems – a. o. 'blue baby' – Failure of the foramen ovale in the heart to close. Oxygen helps as well as time. See a vet though ' We don't do open heart surgery yet'.
- Angular limb deformity – Normally straightens with help of ADE. Be-Complex also helps to build muscles and tendons. If extreme might need to be bandaged and splinted for a bit.
- Down on pasterns – Seen quite commonly, will usually resolve as the cria grows
- Floppy ears – Normally straighten out. In extreme cases a piece of surgical tape helps.
- Constipation – Think meconium first.
- Diarrhoea – Sometimes caused by too much milk – if the cria is still bouncing around and gaining weight – keep observing. Cria looking depressed – take action.
- Congenital problems – Wide range from wry face, no upper air passages, choanal atresia to hermaphrodites. See a vet.

Prematurity / dysmaturity

Being born at 10.5 months does not necessarily mean that the cria is premature. Born full term, but not physiologically mature, they are called dysmature.

Individual assessment is necessary in every case. Most of the time we find that crias tend not display all the signs, but only one or two:

- Teeth not erupted
- Floppy ears
- Unable to stand or unable to hold head up
- Down on pasterns
- No sucking reflex
- Inability to maintain temperature
- Inability to remain sternal
- Short gestation
- Low birth weight

Oxygen might ease respiratory trouble / help lung expansion. Stabilize temperature. (Retain bond with mother). Keep feeding until cria is able to suckle from mother unassisted. Antibiotic might help prevent septicaemia – do not overfeed.